



Education Committee

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Consent-Based Education

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Position Statement

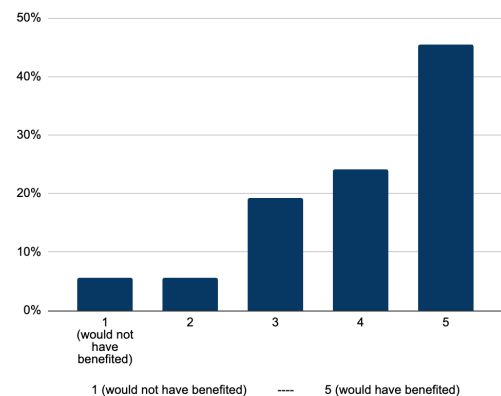
The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports revising Iowa Code 279.50 to include a consent-based education curriculum in Iowa public schools.

Rationale

There are many reasons why sexual violence occurs. The CDC, Mayo Clinic, and Columbia University agrees a factor in preventing sexual violence is education. Iowa schools require sexual education be taught, however, the only mandates for the curriculum are that it must be age-appropriate and science-based, and must include information on the prevention and control of sexually transmitted disease (Iowa Code § 279.50). Education on forming healthy relationships reduces sexual harassment in middle and high school (Santelli et. al, 2018). Unfortunately, the current Iowa consent education curriculum largely lacks this education (SIECUS, 2022).

The 2022 State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC) consent based education survey reached 145 students around Iowa as of November 2022. The results showed overwhelming student support for increased consent education. Over 75% of respondents supported teaching good/bad touch, saying no, and reporting in K-6th grade. Over 75% of respondents supported teaching good/bad touch, saying no, reporting, and anatomy in 6-12th grade. In both cases, under 5% of students believed no consent-based education should be taught in schools.

Self reported expected benefits from more consent education in K-12



The lack of consent-based education does not only affect Iowans. Data from a nationwide survey by Planned Parenthood shows that the majority of people believe there is not enough education for high school students on sexual assault. This survey discovered “The overwhelming majority of people support teaching how to ask for consent (88%), how to recognize whether your partner is giving consent (93%), and how to avoid sexually assaulting someone (95%) in high schools” (Planned Parenthood, 2016). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that over 42% of women who experienced sexual violence were under 18 (Tjaden and Thoennes). Thus, sexual violence prevention must start sooner rather than later. A study from Columbia University found that students who received formal education about how to say no to sex (refusal skills training) before age 18 were less likely to experience sexual assault in college (Mellins, C. A. et al, 2018). This shows that formal consent-based education is important. The Mayo Clinic suggests consent education begins with simple anatomy lessons

during the toddler years (Mayo Clinic, 2022), and the CDC strongly recommends prevention strategies for sexual violence: teaching relationship skills to adolescents (CDC, 2022). These resources help show the connection between education and real-world progress.

At the end of the 2022 SIYC Consent-Based Education Survey, SIYAC included a free-response section for Iowa students to leave quotes. The following were some of the responses:

“I was sexually assaulted by a family member when I was very young ... I still feel some guilt for not being able to report it sooner, however, the root of that issue is simply that I lacked the knowledge of what was happening to me. Young children need to know about their bodies and what is healthy and safe vs what is sexual assault, abuse, harassment, etc in an age-appropriate way...”

“I wasn't taught consent until 10th grade and it was already too late. It's not inappropriate to teach kids how to keep themselves safe.”

“[I was] raped at 13 and again at 16. I am speaking from experience.”

The final quote was from a person who strongly supported increased consent-based education.

Recommended Action

Iowa Code 279.50 “Human Growth and Development Instruction” should be modified to mandate the inclusion of age-appropriate progression in refusal skills training, reporting, and anatomy in Iowa’s K-12 sexual education curriculum. This curriculum would start in elementary school and extend into middle and high school with additional education on giving and recognizing proper consent, identifying predatory behavior, healthy versus unhealthy sexual relationships, and tips on preventing assault. It should be an opt-out program for parents/guardians who wish to educate their child privately. This modification would apply to Iowa public elementary, middle, and high schools.

Regards,
Education Committee
State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council

Sources:

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Iowa Code § 279.50